Inexorable War Needs Mold Life in England

Every Necessity of Normal Peace Existence Subordinated to Demands of Troops—American Finds Determination Everywhere.

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is ripped up and the rails hauled off to France, where they are needed a thousand times more.

Or is it a demand from the front for timber to support the trenches? Somebody else remembers that there are forests, groves, wooded parks, from end to end of England. True, they are the pride and adornment of the most beautifully manicured and decorated countrysides in the world; but what of that? War demands them; England's ally needs them; and so a heartless platoon of Canadian timber cruisers and expert foresters are turned loose among the glorious ancestral estates of England to cut down forests that were ancient when Charles Stuart saved his head for a British crown by hiding in one of them.

War's Demands Inexorable.

Stricken France must be fed, and much of her food must come from overseas; her gallant sons in the trenches have no time to plow fields or build ships, So England takes a hitch at her belt, and from a mercantile marine that has been sorely depleted assigns a million tons to fetch and carry for France. Italy has a bad crop. Her people must get wheat and corn from the Argentine and from America. There are not ships enough; but England can help—and does!

It is midwinter, the most wretchedly bleak midwinter that a half-clad Europe has known since the Napoleonic struggles. Norway must have coal or freeze. True, Norway is a neutral; a base from which overthrifty traders are constantly forwarding, in virtue of handsome profits to themselves, necessities to Germany. England has no coal to spare; certainly none to strengthen a hand that may be serving Germany.

But Norway can't be allowed to freeze; better take a chance and hope that Germany will not too greatly benefit. So matters are patched up, and out of its inadequate and diminishing store England sends a fleet of coal carriers away with the precious coal for Norway. If there isn't enough left to go round at home—well, England in that case will only do a part of the shivering that might all have fallen to Norway to do.

A Shivery Ride To London.

So we shivered along with the rest of England through five hours in that refrigerated train from Liverpool to London. Of course, the train was late; that's almost as much a matter of course as it was for English trains before the war to be on time. The sense that, even if vicariously, we were contributing something to the nation's altruism toward friends and allies was not altogether satisfying to an alien who had assimilated nothing more inspiring than frostbites.

My British friend was more cheerful. He was riding through his beloved native land and studying the landscape, pointing out places of interest, telling of tramps and cycle tours hereabout in other years, his enthusiasm rising as my temperature descended. At length he afforded an opening for a thrust which, with all the bitterness of demi-congelation, I jammed home.

He waved his hand toward the picture in the windows and, with a burst of apologetic sentiment which attested the demoralizing effect of American associations on the characteristic British insouciance, demanded:

"Do you wonder that we English love it?"

Between paroxysms I retorted:

"No; I should think you'd find it a joy to die for such a country; you ought to have a blamed good chance to go to a much warmer one."

Right here let it be interpolated that on that ride from Liverpool to London was visible far less industrial evidence of war's existence than one may note on the ride from Boston to New York or through industrial Pennsylvania or from Washington to New York. I had seen something of what war orders have meant to the industrial Eastern section of the States and had assumed that England would be similarly a panorama of mushroom factories, of vast plants reared as by magic, of cities and towns built overnight to turn out the enginery of war.

Little Evidence of Activity.

I had pictured a succession of military camps, interspersed with teeming industrial hives. There was nothing like that. Rural England seemed untouched. The towns and villages were just as sleepy as when I had last seen them, long before the war.

The fields were in browns and duns instead of the varying greens and yellows I had known in English summertimes. The hedgerows which marked off the checkerboarded fields stood out more sharply from a background that, in winter, afforded more contrast of color. Their straight, firm, clear cut lines and hollow square formations gave the countryside the only touch that could possibly suggest anything military; and that suggestion was accentuated by the feeling that it had all been polished and dusted and inspected by a martinet drill master not longer ago than the hour for guard mount. Liverpool had been full of soldiers, but at the country towns there were not enough of them in sight to impress one unless one were diligently watching for khaki and determined to appreciate it.

Not all England, of course, is thus devoid of the evidence of war's peculiar industrialism. In other parts can be found the monuments to that tremendous development that has made England the world's center of a new and lurid sort of industry. I have seen some of them since; but not on that first day's trip.

In rather more than due course of time and events we came into Euston station, London, scrambled out of our compartments and joined in a bargain counter rush for the goods van to identify and claim our unchecked luggage. The single car was packed so full that it was well nigh impossible to move a piece; and, in accordance with the fixed tradition, everybody's trunk was at the bottom of the heap in the furthest corner and everybody insisted on being served first. It was rumored that some were so fortunate as to emerge from the melee without having had a single trunk tumbled onto their feet. It may be true, but sounds like one of those amiable exaggerations of overwrought optimism.

We were getting used to the khaki, whose wearers thronged the station; but the girl taxi-driver was a new sensation as she swung her car up to the platform and jumped down from the seat to pile our luggage in and atop the vehicle. She was young, active, strong; in the inevitable khaki, cut to military lines, with heavy and very high boots and ve-e-ry short skirt.

All the American men, unaccustomed to this sort of thing, acted exactly like Americans from the provinces when they enter a New York elevator for the first time and remove their hats if ladies are present; we wanted to help the girls to manhandle the bags. Some of the soldiers stepped forward and offered to lend a hand, too; but the thoroughly competent young women shoved aside all tenders of assistance and co-operated among themselves in doing the smashing. I'm sure they are thoroughly emancipated women, for they are manifestly journeymen smashers and charter members of the Mutual Benefit League of Trunk Manufacturers and Trunk Destroyers.

Well, at length, we were whirled away to a hotel and signed the portentous blanks which asseverated our wish to be entertained and described us and our business. We told where we were born, lived, married or single, and all the rest. Then we were told to go around to the Bo- street station and make our peace with the police, which we did, showing passports and answering another long list of questions.

No Fire Allowed.

Back to the hotel and our rooms. Might we have fires? we asked of the chambermaid. No, we might not; there was not enough coal in the house unless we were on the list of wounded or invalids!

So the coldest night of the winter we might have no fire; not even the dubious apology which the appearance gives for the fact of warmth in one of these pocket size hotel room grates. There were hundreds of thousands of others in London that night and many other nights who were without fire, partly because the coal had been shipped away to France and Norway and the fleet, partly because there were not carts and carters enough in London to deliver the supply that was available. Indeed, the shortage of labor was more serious than of coal, a bit of knowledge that for the next fortnight had to buoy up our temperature pretty persistently. Curiously enough, it did, too.

We went down to dine in a big, cold dining room that gave us yet another glimpse of what war means. The place was full of family parties. Every table had a hero or two in khaki. Many tables were entirely surrounded by the men in uniform; they had no families to come in from the country to receive them.

Soldiers Strangely Quiet.

I noticed that these men only groups were strangely quiet. They didn't talk among themselves save for occasional monosyllabic exchanges; they didn't smile, then laugh, then grow a bit noisy as one expects a group of men dining together to do. They looked about very much and watched the other tables where the family parties with the heroes were gathered. Now I know that the men on leave from the front are almost invariably taciturn after this fashion. The place was supernally quiet; depressingly so.

Hard by us was a group we had a long time making out. The dried-up old gentleman in clerical garb was manifestly a country rector; that much was certain. So was the statha of the middle-aged country lady with him, in very new county clothes that didn't feel comfortable on her; she was the dominie's wife. The girl of twelve in short dress and long pigtails was their daughter.

But there were two more in the group—a handsome soldier boy of twenty-six and a girl three or four years younger. They sat side by side, and at first I was sure they were son and daughter of the pastoral family. No one of the five was a bit at home in a London hotel. The young man and woman were shy of each other at first; yet it seemed conceded that they must sit together.

Nobody talked much. We couldn't tell whether the couple were brother and sister or whether they were sweethearts, the girl having come in to London to meet her soldier lover. That was our conclusion of the matter; but to this minute I can't guess which one of them belonged to the family party and which merely expected to be admitted to it if the war should end happily for them all.

Soldier's Caress Blocked.

Once the soldier and the maiden reached simultaneously for their napkins, and I was sure there was going to be a squeezing of hands that would tell something. But it didn't happen. If I thought a telepathic warning of our interest had prevented that little caress I should never forgive myself, for I have a horrible feeling that, ambushed by all that solid front of primness, sentiment never got in all that visit nearer to a second's simple satisfaction than in the moment of that furtive, futile effort at a touching of loving hands.

At another table was a family party easier to understand, but no less interesting; father of forty-odd, (no slacker, he!), mother, little daughter of eight and a youngster of scant twenty-two; both men in khaki. There was no uncertainty about family relationships here; the interesting circumstance was that the father was by his uniform a simple Tommie, while the son was a lieutenant in the flying corps. Father saluted son from time to time with a snappiness whose ostentation told of the pride he divulged to me some days later when we became acquainted and he confided that the boy had brought down two boche planes in one day and been mentioned in orders.

Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, identified by lettered badges on their shoulders, were numerous. They are the ones who always recognize an American by his intonations and frankly introduce themselves as a real home grown Englishman wouldn't do for anything less than the V. C. They always want to know when America is going to "get in," and are sincerely anxious for us to do so.

Many Hail From U. S.

They understand us and our national position seemingly better than do the people of the tight little island. Also there is a touch of furtiveness in the manner of just about one in five of the Canadians as they approach an American, always explained by the fact that if he takes a fancy to you the bashful Canadian finally whispers the data that he's from Peru, Ind., or Lewisburg, Me., or Kalamazoo or Oshkosh or Tombstone or some place else—and generally wishes he were back there, only he wouldn't go for all John D.'s money because he intends to stay till "we finish 'em."

Over a highball that brought in its warming, conversational influence just in time to get past the 9:30 p. m. police restriction against "No more drinks, gents; sorry; too late," we heard a young Canadian of the flying corps telling his pals that "that was all flubdub; there ain't any real Socialists outside the U. S. A., and they don't vote it." Later, having assimilated ourselves to his group, we learned that he was born in San Francisco and had joined the aviation aristocracy for the delightfully altruistic reason that he "always did want to learn to fly one of those machines!"

Away from the realm of cafes and khaki one soon learns that the war is beginning seriously to change the face of things in England. Almost everything is scarce except patriotism and money.

Labor grows scarcer with every week, and no wonder! Women are constantly being pressed into new services as substitutes for men, and the supply of domestic servants in particular shows the effect. Just as in America, women seem anxious to escape from any sort of household service.

The munition factories and the thousand other avenues of independent, self-respecting employment at good wages are taking the women workers away from the homes. The effect of this is immediately reflected in the new styles and methods of entertainment. Not a great many people care in these times even to attempt much entertainment on the old scale; but if they did they would find it well-nigh impossible.

Women as drivers of taxicabs, of delivery carts and even coal wagons, as conductors of omnibuses, operators of "lifts," and in many other occupations have distinctly made good. Moreover, most of them like the new kinds of employment better than the old.

The other day I talked to a French woman, an exile from her own country, now working in a munition plant. She had lived in one of the northern provinces when the Germans came. In the family were herself, her husband and two little girls.

The husband and father promptly joined the colors, and before the war was a hundred days old he lay under one of those pathetic white wooden crosses that stretch in a wide band behind the present fighting area from Switzerland to the sea. The mother and two children fled, the children finally being left with their grandparents in a zone of safety while the mother came to England.

She told me that for two years she worked in a London hotel, where she was paid one shilling a day and provided with quarters and subsistence. It was fearfully hard work, for there is never enough help to go around in a hotel nowadays in England. In addition to the work familiar to a chambermaid in an American hotel, she was required to carry coal upstairs and ashes downstairs, and to feed and care for the grate fires in some twenty-five hotel rooms.

Many Prefer Trenches.

Seeing the women in England doing this kind of work one doesn't wonder that every little while a story comes back from the trenches about some thoroughly capable soldier having been exposed as a woman in disguise. They might easily enough justify the masquerade on such a ground as it was easier in the trenches than at home.

This particular French woman, who was strong and capable and had acquired a very good command of English, said she was now being paid 8 shillings a day, while the lodgings and meals provided for her made it possible to live more satisfactorily than she had ever done before in England. She said with some pride that she was now saving a good share of her earnings.

She had even saved something and sent it home to her children when she earned only one shilling a day. Now she is getting together a prodigious hoard which at the war's end she will carry back to France to help re-establish a home for herself and the two children. She was bright, cheerful, and happy in the thought, which nowadays is a firm conviction with all the French, that the war is going to end in about a year at the most, with a glorious victory for France.

England is full of French and Belgian exiles. Many of the Belgians are likely to remain here. Their attachment to their own country is not so deep as that of the French, and it has been so thoroughly wrecked that it seems doubtful whether the scattered fragments of the nation can ever be restored to their own land. They love Belgium as devotedly as ever, just as the Irish who went to America following 1846 loved Ireland; but like the Irish-Americans and unlike the French, they are not likely to return.

French Hope To Return.

On the other hand, the devotion of the French to their own soil is marvelous. It would be hard to find a Frenchman or a French woman among the exiles who has any other thought than to return home as soon as possible. Nearly all of those living in England are working, earning good wages and saving a considerable part, and almost without exception they invest their savings in the securities that the French government offers to them. It is their way of helping France.

The redistribution of labor in Great Britain through the simple influence of good wages which take it away from the employments where it is least needed and transfer it to those where it is most needed amounts to a quiet revolution.

Of course there are mistakes and absurdities in the process; a good many square pegs get into round holes, but the spirit of service, the determination to be useful and to learn to be useful just as rapidly as possible, is almost universal. The other evening I met a young woman who had never in her life before the war attempted any more serious physical labor than a tennis game or a swimming match. She had lived all her life in outer London, knowing the city and its ways very much better than she did the country. She assured me that when she volunteered to work on a farm from which the men had all gone to the war or the factories she just knew enough about a cow not to be afraid of it, because she was used to horses, and cows were so much like horses.

City Girl Tends Herd.

Today, after nearly a year, that girl is perfectly convinced that "making about two-thirds of a good stout farmhand" is the greatest lark in the world. She "swanked" (British for bragging) about how fond the cows in the dairy had become of her, and how she could put the gear on a horse as quickly as any body in the neighborhood. She said she hadn't plowed any yet, but was about to graduate from caring for the poultry and milking and attending to half a dairy herd of over twenty cows, and intended to tackle plowing in the spring. She laughingly showed her hands and guessed that by the time she had done a season's plowing none of the men would be likely to bother her by attempting to hold them.

All year long she has been getting up at 3:30 in the morning, in a wonderful khaki uniform of high boots, short skirt and trench coat, to take care of her cows. She proclaimed that the chickens and ducks had become a nuisance because they followed her all over the place, while even the pheasants had during the very cold period become so tame that they had made overtures in the direction of sociability.

I met her week-ending in London, and she talked about going out to Canada or Australia after the war and becoming a farmer in her own right. She was intensely interested in what some of the Americans in the party were telling her about pioneering in South Dakota in the years after the Rosebud reservation was opened.

War Changes Life Plans.

So much for what the war has done to the tastes and inclinations of a clever young woman of the middle class. Now here is the story of a young man who apologetically edged himself up toward me in the lounge of a hotel where we were having our after-dinner coffee, remarking that he took the liberty because he could tell by my tone that I was an American and had discovered that Americans didn't insist upon much formality in introductions.

He was born and raised in London and was a graduate of the City of London College. He looked thirty-three years old and modestly admitted that before the war he had been by way of getting very fairly established in business life. But he wanted to know about America, about the West, about the great Canadian Northwest.

He was looking for somebody who could tell him about South America. He had accumulated a good deal of general information about Australia and New Zealand, for the Australians are the greatest boosters of their own country anywhere in this world outside southern California.

My friend explained that if there had never been a war he would doubtless have gone right on working in the establishment where he started, ultimately perhaps becoming the head of a department. The idea of possibly doing something else and liking it better would never have occurred to him.

But the war had changed all that. With an odd tone of confidence, he told me that it had taught him what the word initiative meant. He had been one of the earliest to enlist in the new army, and had come home on a few days' leave and to get his first commission.

"When the war is over, if I'm alive, I am going out to some of the colonies," he said. "I will never go back to the old way of life. I couldn't stand it now.

Will Finish the Job.

"If you will talk among the city chaps who have been out they will pretty generally tell you the same thing. It has been very hard, and if one of them who has actually been in France tells you he wants to return you can put it down that he is lying to you. But they are all going back nevertheless; we've got this job on our hands and are going to finish it; we are going to finish it right; if not this year, then next.

"After that it will be us for the empire. What I want is land, a chance to make myself really independent, to live outdoors and on the soil. The Canadians are all fine fellows, and we are seeing enough of them to make us understand how much they love their country and its life, and how much we are going to love that sort of country and that kind of life. I don't know what London is going to do for the men after the war; I suppose the women will have to go on doing the work as they are doing so much of it now."

Asked if he didn't believe a good many of the men from the British towns would be willing to come back and live in England if they could only get a chance at the soil, he said he didn't think so. Most of them had come to think England wasn't big enough for the kind of thing they wanted to do.

Neither did he believe that many of they would go to the United States; they wanted to help build for their own country, even if they didn't believe they could do it more effectively by staying at home.